

The Crucible, Act III by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up A

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

The excessive extravagance of Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate investigations of the early 1950s captured headlines. However, an equally important group was active in the House of Representatives at the same time. This was the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1947, this committee started to devote prodigious amounts of energy and effort to uncover communist influences in the Hollywood motion picture industry.

At first, 41 so-called "friendly" witnesses testified voluntarily. These people may have been puzzled or baffled by the committee's questions. Possibly they feared a black mark or a disruption of their careers if they did not adopt an obliging, dutiful attitude toward the lawmakers. In any case, they gave the committee some names of people who, they said, belonged to left-wing organizations or were known to have left-wing views.

When called to testify, some of these witnesses agreed to cooperate by naming others. Others, however, invoked the Fifth Amendment's protection against self-incrimination and refused to give evidence. These witnesses faced a cruel choice. If they denied membership in a suspicious group that they had belonged to, they could be charged with perjury. If they admitted membership, they would have been forced to name other members, like those accused of witchcraft in Miller's *The Crucible*. In the end, many of the "Hollywood Ten," as this group was called, went to jail.

Eventually, over 300 writers, actors, directors, and technicians were placed on a blacklist drawn up by the Hollywood film studios. These people were either denied employment or had to work in anonymity, receiving no credit by name. Perhaps the most frightening part of this persecution was its random character. Disaster could strike a person anytime, and for almost any reason.

1. Underline the word that gives a clue to the meaning of extravagance. Use a word meaning the opposite of extravagance in a sentence of your own.
2. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of prodigious. What are two synonyms of prodigious?
3. Underline the word in this sentence that gives a clue to the meaning of baffled. What is an antonym for baffled?
4. Underline the words that hint at the meaning of disruption. What is a synonym for this word?
5. Circle the word in this sentence that offers a clue to the meaning of dutiful. Write a sentence about someone acting in a dutiful fashion.
6. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of perjury. What should you do to avoid being charged with perjury?
7. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of anonymity.
8. Underline the words in the next sentence that give a clue to the meaning of random. What is a synonym for random?